Letter from Taizé

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Taizé
European Meeting of Young Adults
28 December 1994 - 1 January 1995
PARIS

THE SUMMER MEETINGS IN TAIZE

Welcome...

The intercontinental meetings of young adults which are held throughout the year in Taizé are particularly intense in the summer months. From June to September, two to six thousand people come each week, from all the countries of Europe without exception.

Russians from Saint Petersburg, Moscow or Novosibirsk live alongside young people from Portugal, Sicily, Greece, Bulgaria or Scotland. Every Sunday, four coaches transport those who come from Romania. To come to Taizé, each week hundreds of people from the Baltic counties spend three days and three nights in their coaches.

In the midst of those from Europe, young Africans, Asians and Latin Americans are an important presence.

As in the past two summers, there was also a group of boys from Bosnia in Taizé for the whole summer.

Times of prayer in the church, which has been enlarged several times since the fall of the Berlin wall, alternate with times of sharing and Bible studies. Week after week, participants go to the wellsprings of faith, preparing themselves to take on responsibilities and looking for ways of becoming bearers of reconciliation on their return home.

This year Bible groups, offered to all who want to deepen their understanding of the Gospel, dealt with holi-

→ 8

THE EUROPEAN MEETING OF YOUNG ADULTS AT THE END OF THE YEAR

Paris Prepares to Welcome

In the greater Paris area, preparation groups are already at work.

Many families in Paris and the surrounding region have not forgotten that the first European meeting took place in their city in 1978. Participants came mainly from the West and they were all able to fit in Notre Dame Cathedral for the prayers. Parisians also remember the European meetings of 1983 and 1988, when three, then four large churches had to be linked by telephone. And now they are happy to host a meeting which will have an even vaster dimension, since half of those taking part will come from Eastern Europe.

In a booklet on the European meeting published simultaneously by French magazines and by the diocesan newspaper, Cardinal Lustiger, the archbishop of Paris, wrote:

"For many years, Taizé has placed itself at the service of reconciliation in Europe. I was an admiring and grateful witness to this when I was a campus minister during the 1960s. What does this effort of reconciliation, of communion, that Taizé asks for consist in? The youth of Europe must go beyond egotism and cynicism... But you have to want truly to commit your life. You have to awaken faith in God, Creator and Saviour of human beings, to such an extent that it becomes deep-seated. You have to awaken wills to follow Christ in his Passion so that they are able to overcome the obstacle of hatred.

"If Taizé is able to do this, it is because prayer has a prominent place in these gatherings. Prayer is not a magic potion. It brings to birth in hearts and minds a new attitude whereby enemies are reconciled; they agree to love beyond their hatred or indifference and find the courage to act together...

"Far from avoiding concrete questions, Taizé teaches wounded generations how not to flee into forgetfulness, harshness...or drugs... The Taizé meetings enable young people to discover that the language of faith can overcome the obstacles of culture and language. And in addition, they open each person to love unknown brothers and sisters, and thus foster the sharing of gifts."

In the greater Paris area, preparation groups are coming into being. For example in the parish close to the Porte de Versailles, where the common prayers and the meals will take place:

"Since early May, Vanves has been actively getting ready for the European meeting in Paris. The project of welcoming the participants in our parish was presented and accepted by the parish council. In this way, not just the campus ministry but the whole Christian community has as its objective a successful welcome. We want to go towards the different groups present in our neighbourhood as well as visit schools and religious communities. A meeting to make people aware is planned as soon as summer is over and also some activities: giving out information in the parish, a stand in the marketplace, prayer services. We know that we shall have to ask many people to open their doors, but if they see that we are not afraid to go and meet them,

perhaps it will be easier for them to dare to welcome young adults whom they do not yet know."

In September, a few brothers and young volunteers from Taizé began to visit the 600 parishes able to help with the welcome. The parishes and other congregations will look for families and communities that agree to open their doors, and also for persons who can make a presentation during the morning meetings on the theme of "places of hope."

Thinking about the way she was welcomed in other countries, Marie from Paris wrote this "open letter to a Polish friend" that expresses people's hopes for the European meeting and the spirit of the preparation:

Dear Agneska,

While we are beginning our preparations for the meeting in Paris, I have been thinking about the wonderful welcome you gave us in Wroclaw in 1989, and I am so happy that I shall be able to respond by welcoming you and your friends here!

Of course, we have had several European meetings in Paris already, and in 1988 we welcomed several thousand young people from Eastern Europe. But this meeting will be different, since this time there will be so many of you, from Poland of course, but also from Lithuania, Russia, Romania and many other countries too... Lots of families are already preparing to welcome you in this area; they are happy to open their doors to people who have come such a distance to meet them and to share with them.

Your head must be full of images when you think of Paris! It's true that our city is rich historically and culturally. But the greatest of its riches is undoubtedly the diversity of its inhabitants! You can meet people from all over the world: from Africa, India, Latin America and people from the whole of Europe, and not just tourists. Did you know that there is even a Chinatown in Paris? In my parish, there are Portuguese, Haitian and Vietnamese communities. There are no problems between us, but we do not know one another well. By welcoming you and your friends, we will also learn to know better those who are living alongside us. Paris is a city of contrasts: as in many other places, you can find situations of great material distress and many people who suffer from loneliness. But there are also—you will see—a great many initiatives undertaken by young people to overcome indifference and to show how this diversity can be a wonderful opportunity.

In communion in prayer, I look forward to welcoming you,

Prayer of Preparation

Opening Chant

Jubilate, servite (canon) or
Laudate omnes gentes

Chant

Jesus, your light is shining within us, let not my doubts and my darkness speak to me; Jesus, your light is shining within us, let my heart always welcome your love.

Verses from Psalm 103 or Psalm 23

with Alleluia sung between each verse

- Bless the Lord, O my soul, from the depths of my being, bless God's holy name. Alleluia
- Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God's good deeds. Alleluia
- God forgives all your offenses, and heals all your diseases. Alleluia
- God saves your life from the grave, and crowns you with tender love. Alleluia
- God contents you with good things all your days, and your youth is renewed like an eagle's. Alleluia
- The Lord acts with justice, and takes the side of the oppressed. Alleluia
- God revealed to Moses his ways, to the people of Israel his saving deeds. Alleluia

Song

Children or young people can come forward to light a large candle or oil-lamp placed on a stand

C'est toi ma lampe Seigneur.
Mon Dieu éclaire ma ténèbre.
(or: The Lord is my light)

A reading from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew

Jesus said, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they? And can any of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your span of life?... So do not worry and say, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink' or 'What will we wear?'... Your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. But strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Matthew 6,25-34 (or Matt 5,38-48)

Chant

Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo. (or: Wait for the Lord)

Silence

Intercessions

Kyrie eleison or Gospodi pomiluj sung after each intention

- Creator and Saviour God, source of peace for all the earth: you are our life...
- Creator and Saviour God, you want to lead all the nations according to the will of your love: you are our life...
- O Christ, our Shepherd, you lead us to the springs of gladness: you are our life...
- O Christ, you call us to share with others; you bring us together in your love...
- O Christ, our Shepherd, you come to be with those who are in difficulty, with those who are lonely and abandoned...
- Spirit of consolation, you awaken in us a love that forgives; you breathe upon each one of us...

Chant

Nada te turbe (or: Confitemini Domino)

Our Father

sung or recited together

Prayer

Jesus, our joy, the astonishing thing about your Gospel is that, since your resurrection, you always come to us, you always remain alongside us. Wherever we are at, you always wait for us. And you tell us: Come to me, you who are overburdened, and you will find peace.

The prayer can now continue with the prayer around the cross. Each person is invited to come up and pray in silence around the cross which has been laid flat on some bricks or cushions on the floor. They may wish to place their forehead on the cross as a sign that they entrust to Christ their own burdens and those of others.

Chants

Stay with me, Per crucem, De noche,
Jesus remember me...

The prayer can conclude with a celebration of light as a sign of the resurrection. Each one can hold a small candle, and pass the flame from one to another.

Chants

Laudate Dominum, Jubilate Deo...

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Preparing the Paris Meeting at Home

In all the countries of Europe, and even on other continents, for example in Japan, young people have began getting ready to come to Paris.

Prayer is an important part of this preparation: a pilgrimage of trust has to be begun in one's own situation, even before one leaves home. Would it be possible to propose to all who will come to Paris a regular prayer, at least once a month, then once a week in the time just before Christmas? The suggested prayer format (see page 2) can be used once and then adapted by changing the songs and Bible texts.

A reflection in small groups is another way of preparing oneself, by already getting into the spirit of the European meeting. Here are some suggested topics:

* How can I take (or prepare myself to take) responsibilities for others? How can I help others discover their own gifts?

* Is prayer for me a source of communion, a time to rediscover what is essential in my life?

* How can I take part, in my own situation, in initiatives that make my Christian community a place of welcome, hope and kindness for those who are in need?

It would also be good to come up with visits or concrete actions in line with these topics. For example, going to see people who work with those in need, people who are alone or abandoned, places of community prayer, neighbouring parishes...

Some will be happy to take part in meetings using the "Johannine hours," with a time of silence and a reflection on Bible texts.

➜ Addresses for the preparation in each region are found on page 7.

Date: Arrive Wednesday morning, 28th December 1994 between 7am and 12 noon. Depart Sunday afternoon, 1st January 1995.

General programme: Participants will be welcomed by families and local church communities throughout the city. Morning prayer each day will be in one of the local churches of the neighbourhood where you are staying. Then meetings in small groups with other participants and with local people. Each day — midday and evening — there will be two common prayers for all participants of the meeting together. In the afternoon, workshops on various themes.

Accommodation: Simple conditions. Bring sleeping-bag and lightweight mattress. Accommodation with families, in church halls and schools, contributes a element of sharing to the whole meeting, we therefore ask groups not to arrange their own accommodation apart.

18 to 29 year olds:

- those who can help, as animators in parishes and places of accommodation, or in teams for practical task, or in the choir group, need to arrive on Monday 26th December, between 8am and 3pm. (Arrival not possible on 27th December.)
- those who arrive on 28th December choose one of three ways of taking part:
  • participation in the life of parishes of the city (this is the main group)
  • the silence group (has its own separate accommodation)
  • while still participating in the life of a parish, helping in a team that has a practical responsibility (meal distribution, church team, choir group). It is still possible to join such a group on 28th December.

16 and 17 year olds may come to the meeting only if accompanied by group leaders over 20 years old in such a way that, for accommodation, they can separate into small groups of no more than 7 (girls and boys separate) each with a group leader. Arrival: 28th December — not before. All take part in the main group during the meeting: "participation in the life of parishes of the city".

Adults over 30: the European Meeting is intended for young adults under 30, however a few adults over this age can also come, in particular if they are leading groups of young adults. Adults over 30 all participate in the main group, and arrive on 28th December (not before). Those who cannot accept the same simple accommodation conditions as the young people and who need a "real bed" indicate this on their registration form. Those who are accompanying a group of young people are welcome to stay with them, if they will accept the same simple accommodation.

Families with children, and people with a disability who need special accommodation should contact Taizé — best by telephone in October or November — to arrange this.

The contribution to costs expected from each participant can only be given exactly in the autumn. For young people from Britain, it will be in the region of 500-600 French francs for the whole meeting. As well as the hire of meeting-halls and equipment, this covers all meals and a public transport pass.

Send in your registration form by 1st December at the latest. Further information will be sent in November to those who register earlier. Send the form to Taizé, either directly or through the person leading your group.

Travel:

- from Britain: for special coaches to the meeting (also for those who wish to arrive on 26th Dec. to help) contact Nuneaton Coaches, Whitacre Road, NUNEATON CV11 6BN. Tel: (0203) 325682 or 328410; Fax: (0203) 375875. Otherwise: sometimes cheap air-fares are available to Paris, or the tunnel...
- from other countries: write to Taizé for information.

Registration Form

Send before 1st December to:
"European Meeting", Taizé Community,
71250 TAIZÉ, France. Tel: (+33) 85.50.30.02
(9-11 am and 3.30-5.30 pm) Fax: (+33) 85.50.30.16.

First Name:

Family Name:

Address:

(with postcode and country)

Tel.: ...../..... Occupation: ..... Age: .....

(Circle "Yes" or "No" or complete where necessary)

- I am coming with a group from the town of .....
  led by .....
- For adults (over 30 years) and those who cannot sleep on the floor:
  I need a bed: yes / no If "yes", say whether you are (please circle):
  woman man couple family with ... children disabled person with helper
- I will arrive on 28th December: yes / no (arrival time between 7am and 12pm)
- I will arrive on 26th December (17-30 year olds only): yes / no
  to help with (please circle): animation / work / music team.
- N.B. If, for any reason, you are arranging your own accommodation please send us the address where you will be staying.
- I would like ..... more registration forms (photocopy your own if possible)

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

Before beginning to teach and to perform signs, Jesus invited some people to share his life. This life together already expressed what he was going to proclaim.

"As Jesus went walking beside the Sea of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew, casting their nets into the sea. They were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Come with me, and I will make you fishers of human beings.' Leaving their nets at once, they followed him" (Matt 4,18-19).

"Jesus went walking..." From the day he was baptized, Jesus "went out:" he no longer lived for himself; he chose to live a life rooted solely in the Father's love. Returning to Galilee, he was forced to leave Nazareth, the city where he had lived until then (Luke 4,24). From that time on Jesus was on the road; his mission was urgent. He himself said, "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matt 8,20). But that day, Jesus went walking beside the lake with no apparent destination; he seemed just to be taking a walk.

"Jesus saw two brothers..." In that region, Jesus was a stranger; nobody knew him yet. He looked and saw two fishermen working. They had a trade, a family business; they were partners. Men who knew what it meant to work for a living. They were not in need; they asked for nothing. But Jesus saw something deeper. His gaze penetrates the heart. He "knows what is in human beings" (John 2,25). He is familiar with the longing hidden deep within people's being that motivates them. He is aware of the presence of the breath of God in every human being. He also knows about the fears and the weaknesses that keep people living on the surface of their being. Jesus' gaze is peaceful, steeped in silence. He welcomes the person he looks at. It is not a way of looking that evaluates and calculates in order to get an idea and make an estimate. It is a look that waits and that already loves. It allows the Father's gaze to shine through. It is the Creator's way of looking, with the passion to live in communion with the one created in his likeness. "Come with me..." The look is followed by speech, by words that confirm what was already given in silence. Jesus, an unknown stranger, speaks a few words that could easily be ignored and no one would ever notice. By this invitation, Christ introduces himself. A few words that are enough to commit those who welcome them to an adventure that will turn their entire existence upside down.

No long preparation or introductions, no need to make friends. In its very simplicity, this invitation emphasizes what really matters. Jesus wishes neither to convince nor to seduce. He offers no enticements: nothing to gain, neither success, nor wisdom, nor power, no exciting plans... Jesus does not wish any insubstantial enthusiasm. Everything in this invitation is clear: Jesus is someone who invites people to enter a relationship based on trust.

"Come with me: I am waiting for you, right now. I am taking the initiative. I am confident that you will hear and respond. I believe in you even before you know me; I believe in you more than you believe in yourself. Do you accept that? Will you let me believe in you? The only thing you know about me is the trust I have in you, the risk I am taking in counting on you. Will you dare to believe this? What I am waiting for is for you to dare to live with me a life based on trust alone. Or will you run away from my look? Will you steal off elsewhere, paying no attention to my call, coming up with a thousand important excuses? Will you reply, 'I am not yet ready. Give me time; I have to work out so many contradictions; I have to grow up... Wait until I am more solid; I would be so unhappy if I disappointed you! And what if I made a mistake? Or if I changed my mind tomorrow? Or else: yesterday I would have said yes, but now it's too late.'"

This invitation is daring: to enter into a human life, to change its course without offering any guarantees or security, to dare to do this without an abuse of power. It is radical: to leave everything, not as an inordinate demand but as a light that illuminates the depths of what is given. Jesus can make this demand because he knows that he does not keep those he invites for himself; he receives them as people who are entrusted to him by the Father: "They were yours and you gave them to me" (John 17,6). He is sure that God will fill them to overflowing.

"Leaving everything, they followed him." This invitation is a creative word: it opens a way forward and provides the means to walk along this way. Christ had asked them the only question he could not answer in their stead, the question that reveals to them a new freedom. And they were astonished to find that everything was ready for them to understand and to respond!

Jesus' invitation to the disciples was not a test or trial, the first step in their apprenticeship. From the very first meeting, it is a sharing with them of what lies at the heart of his own adventure, the happiness of his life, revealed at his baptism. By this bold gesture, he reveals and gives form to what is burning in the human heart—to live the miracle of trust. Far from being crushed by the seriousness and the stakes of his mission, Jesus will count on God's faith in human beings. Recognizing this gift "revealed to little ones" will be his prayer of praise in the course of all his meetings with others.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

NOVEMBER

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 Jn 3.1-3 **Mt 5.1-12**
1 TUE ALL SAINTS
How great a love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called God's children. And that is what we are!

Rm 14.7-9 **Jn 11.25-26**
2 WED While we live, as when we die, we belong to the Lord. For Christ died and returned to life that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Rm 5.1-5 **Lk 12.49-50**
3 THU Our hope will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

Lk 13.18-21 Rm 5.6-11
4 FRI Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like leaven that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it all rose.

Rm 6.4-6 **Mt 28.1-8**
5 SAT Buried with Christ in baptism, we live a new life with him.

Mk 12.38-44 1 K 17.10-16
6 SUN Jesus saw a poor widow put two small coins into the temple treasury and, calling his disciples, he said, "In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others, for they all gave out of their wealth, but she has put in everything she possessed."

Rm 6.12-14 Lk 14.7-11
7 MON Give yourselves to God and then sin will no longer have any power over you – you are not under law, but under grace.

Lk 14.12-14 Rm 7.4-6
8 TUE Jesus said: When you have a dinner, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, and you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you.

Rm 8.1-4 Lk 14.15-23
9 WED Paul writes: The law of the Spirit, which gives life in Christ Jesus, has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Rm 8.5-11 **Lk 14.25-33**
10 THU The Spirit seeks life and peace.

Rm 8.14-17 Lk 15.1-7
11 FRI Paul writes: You did not receive a spirit which makes you a slave to fear again; you received the spirit of sonship by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

Rm 8.18-25 Lk 15.8-10
12 SAT Paul writes: The whole of creation has been groaning as in childbirth up to the present time. And we too groan inwardly as we wait with eagerness for our bodies to be set free.

Mk 13.24-32 Dn 12.1-3
13 SUN Jesus said: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Lk 15.11-24 Rm 8.26-30
14 MON Coming to his senses, the prodigal son said: I will leave this place and go to my Father and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son." But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

Rm 8.31-39 **Lk 15.25-32**
15 TUE St. Paul writes: I am certain of this: neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Rm 10.5-13 Lk 16.9-15
16 WED The Word of God is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart.

Rm 11.29;33-36 Lk 16.16
17 THU Paul writes: God never revokes his gifts or his call.

Lk 17.3-10 Rm 12.1-2
18 FRI Jesus said: If your brother wrongs you seven times in a day and seven times comes back to you and says, "I repent", forgive him.

Rm 12.3-13 **Lk 17.20-21**
19 SAT Paul writes: When you give, give generously, from the heart; when you do works of mercy, do so with joy.

Dn 7.13-14 **Jn 18.33b-37**
20 SUN Daniel said: In a vision I saw one like a son of man and the people of every tongue and nation worshipped him. His kingdom is everlasting, it will never pass away.

Rm 12.14-21 Lk 17.11-19
21 MON Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing, weep with those who weep.

Rm 13.8-10 Lk 17.22-25
22 TUE All the commandments can be summed up in this: Love your neighbour as yourself.

Rm 13.11-14 Lk 18.1-8
23 WED Paul writes: Let us put aside the deeds of darkness. Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lk 18.9-14 Rm 14.1-9
24 THU In a parable, Jesus said that the one who prayed saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner", went home forgiven.

Rm 14.13-19 **Lk 18.15-17**
25 FRI St. Paul writes: Let us stop judging one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any obstacle in your brother's way.

Rm 15.1-6 **Lk 18.18-30**
26 SAT May the God of perseverance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves following the example of Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and one voice you may glorify God.

Jr 33.14-16 **Mk 13.33-37**
27 SUN ADVENT
Days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall fulfil the promise of happiness I made to my people, and from among them I shall raise one who will do what is just and right in the land.

Is 2.1-5 Mt 8.5-11
28 MON The peoples of the earth will say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, for him to teach us his ways and for us to walk in his paths.

Lk 10.21-24 Is 4.2-6
29 TUE Jesus said: I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and clever, and revealing them to little children.

Mk 16.15-20 1 Co 9.16-23
30 WED St ANDREW
Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.

JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 23,33-49

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

To renew our trust in God, we need to contemplate what is at the heart of our faith, the dead and risen Christ.

In his body, Jesus brought the love of God to places where God seemed to be absent. He experienced anguish, failure, being abandoned by almost all his close friends, humiliation, torture, exclusion and a violent death. He knows what it means to be nothing any longer. He speaks to us from the very last place of all humanity. "He wanted to make our sins his own" (St Augustine).

Jesus' last words help us to understand the two inner attitudes he maintains to the very end. Toward human beings, he expresses forgiveness and intercession (23,34). To God, he entrusts everything into his hands; he calls him "Father" to the last; he continues to trust in the One who can create new life even out of this situation (23,46).

Luke tells us how those who saw Jesus die were deeply moved. Looking at the cross means welcoming within ourselves the two attitudes Jesus persevered in until his very last breath and in this way taking part in his mystery. He entrusts this mystery to us so that we can live it out in the world.

It is true that our forgiveness is not always total. And when we call God "Father," our trust can remain fragile, this trust in God who gives us life, who can create something new and who invites us to dare to be creators in our turn. But it is important to remember that Christ welcomes the little we have and makes up what is lacking. He forgives with us. By his Spirit, he says with us and in us: "Father!"

- Where do I find the wellsprings of Christ's forgiveness?
- How can forgiveness be a priority in our Christian communities?
- Am I familiar with this experience: continuing, even in a difficult situation, to call God "Father," in other words to trust in him? Did this trust help me to deal with suffering and even to find new life in the midst of it?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

DECEMBER

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

Is 6.1-8 Mt 7.21-27

1 **THU** In a vision, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send?" And he answered, "Here I am, send me."

Mt 15.29-37 Is 7.10-14

2 **FRI** Jesus took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke them and gave them to his disciples, and they gave them to the crowd. They all ate their fill.

Is 8.11-18 **Mt 11.2-5**

3 **SAT** Isaiah said: When he laid his hand upon me, God told me, "Do not fear all that people fear. Do not be afraid. I am the one whom you are to regard as holy."

Lk 3.1-6 Ba 5.1-9

4 **SUN** John the Baptist came as is written in the book of Isaiah: A voice of one who cries in the desert, "Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight his paths!"

Is 11.1-4 Lk 5.17-26

5 **MON** Isaiah said: God's Spirit will be upon the Messiah. He will not judge by appearances, but he will judge the weak with justice and give fair sentence for the humble in the land.

Is 11.5-9 Mt 18.12-14

6 **TUE** Isaiah said: On that day there shall be no more hurt or violence, for the land will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the bottom of the sea.

Ps 86.11 Mt 11.16-19 **Is 11.10-12**

7 **WED** Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth. Give me an undivided heart that I may revere your name.

Lk 1.26-38 Ep 1.11-12

8 **THU** Mary said to the angel: I am the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.

Is 12.2-6 Mt 11.16-19

9 **FRI** I will trust and not be afraid, for God is my strength and my song.

Is 25.1;3-8 **Lk 1.67-79**

10 **SAT** Lord, you have been a refuge for the weak, a shelter for then needy in distress.

Lk 3.10-18 Zp 3.14-18

11 **SUN** John the Baptist said to the people: Anyone who has two tunics must share with the one who has none. And anyone with something to eat must do the same.

Is 25.9-10a Mt 21.23-27

12 **MON** On that day, it will be said: Look, this is our God; we put our hope in him and he saved us. Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.

Is 26.4;7-9 Mt 21.28-32

13 **TUE** Lord, you level out the path of the just. As we follow the path of your judgements, we set our hope in you; you are the desire of our souls.

Is 26.12-13;19 Lk 7.18-23

14 **WED** Isaiah said: You who dwell in the dust, wake up and sing for joy: your dead will live.

Is 28.16-17a Lk 7.24-30

15 **THU** The Lord says: See, I am laying a foundation stone for my people. And I will take justice for a measure and righteousness as a level.

Is 29.18-23 Jn 5.33-36

16 **FRI** When the Lord comes, the deaf will hear the words of the book and, delivered from shadows and darkness, the eyes of the blind will see. The poor and resourceless will discover ever more joy in God.

Is 30.15-18 **Mt 1.18-24**

17 **SAT** The Lord says: Your salvation is in returning and rest, your strength lies in calm and trust.

Lk 1.39-45 Mi 5.1-4

18 **SUN** Elizabeth said to Mary: Blessed is she who believed that the promise the Lord made her would be fulfilled.

Is 49.13 **Lk 1.5-17**

19 **MON** Shout for joy, you heavens; earth exult! For the Lord is consoling his people and having compassion on his afflicted ones.

Jr 23.5-6 Lk 1.18-25

20 **TUE** The Lord says: The days are coming, when I shall raise up an upright Branch, and in his days my people will be saved. And this is the name he will be called: "The Lord our Righteousness."

Heb 10.36-37 **Lk 1.26-38**

21 **WED** You need to persevere. For in just a very little while, he who is coming will come – he will not delay.

Lk 1.46-56 1 S 1.24-2.1

22 **THU** Mary said: The Lord's merciful love stretches from age to age upon those who revere him.

Is 62.1-5 Lk 1.57-66

23 **FRI** Isaiah said: For the sake of my people, I shall not keep silent. I shall not rest until her justice shines out like the breaking of day.

Lk 2.1-14 Is 9.1-6 Tt 2.11-14

24 **SAT** The angel of the Lord said to the shepherds: Do not be afraid. I bring you news of a great joy, a joy to be shared by all the people: today a Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.

Lk 2.15-20 Is 62.11-12 Tt 3.4-7

25 **SUN** CHRISTMAS
The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him and then returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

Ac 7.55-60 Mt 18.1-4

26 **MON** St STEPHEN
As they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And with these words he fell asleep.

Mk 1.16-20 1 Jn 1.1-4

27 **TUE** St JOHN
Jesus said to his first disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.

Mt 7.7-11 Heb 1.1-6

28 **WED** Jesus said: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Is 43.18-20 **Lk 9.22-24**

29 **THU** God says: Do not dwell upon the past; look, I am doing something new.

Jn 15.9-13 1 Jn 3.1-2

30 **FRI** Jesus said: There is no greater love than giving one's life for those one loves.

Jr 29.11-14 Mk 10.17-22

31 **SAT** The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. When you seek me, you shall find me, for you will seek me with all your heart.

JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 1,39-45

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Mary said yes to the angel's words. She will be the mother of the Messiah, of Jesus who is to be born. But what is happening to her is still her secret. She cannot talk about it; no one would understand. So she goes to visit Elizabeth, who will not ask her for any explanations. With her relative she will be understood; she will be in peace.

But there is still more. The visit to Elizabeth is a kind of prelude to the great joy of Christmas. Mary is in a hurry not out of fear, but out of joy. She runs, just like the shepherds who, on Christmas night "hurry" (Luke 2,16) to see the Child, Mary and Joseph.

When Mary meets Elizabeth, it is first of all her child who understands, the future John the Baptist, who is not yet born but who is already filled with the Holy Spirit. In his mother's womb he leaps for joy. Then Elizabeth begins to bless Mary and Jesus. In the old days, people dared to praise in one breath God and those in whom God was at work.

Although Mary is blessed for being the mother of the Lord, she is called "happy" on account of her faith. It is therefore clear that her happiness can become ours. She alone is Christ's mother according to the flesh. But, through faith, "Christ is formed in us all" (Gal 4,19). Jesus will later say, comparing everyone who believes to his mother, "Happy those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11,28).

- Who can become an Elizabeth for me, in other words someone who is able to understand me without many words?
- How can we dare to rejoice in what God is accomplishing in and around us?
- Have I discovered a happiness in believing, in saying yes to the words God speaks to me?

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Listening to the Continents

India

A priest who accompanied a group of young Indians to Taizé for two months tells what it meant for him:

When I first heard of Taizé, I had just been appointed youth director and I did not feel fit for the task. So I was very happy to take part in the second meeting in Madras in 1988. It was unbelievable to see ten thousand youth squatting there on the ground in silence, praying! I could see that something definite was being offered to young people there. And so we continued. In the parish where I am now, every two months, 200 to 300 youth from the twelve parishes of the deanery meet for a day of prayer and sharing and in the parish itself, the youth meet for prayer every Wednesday morning.

The pilgrimage of trust, with its special emphasis on prayer and solidarity, has been a definite light for me. When young people come to Taizé, they are accepted as they are. Nothing is imposed on them, but in the course of their stay they receive something, something lasting. Seeing this helps me in my own role in reaching out to youth. In India, the challenges for the young are enormous. With all the changes now taking place in our country, faith is in danger of being relegated to second or third place in our lives. So how can we present the faith in a way that touches people at a deeper level? In order to do that, I myself must be a person of experience. I cannot give what I do not have. It is my own spirit that I have to deepen so that, like the leaven in the dough, I don't have to worry so much about doing as about being.

Perhaps my biggest discovery here has been the fact that "the communion of love that is the Church" is possible! Indeed, now I know that the Church cannot be anything else. So I feel a great desire to be an agent of communion and reconciliation. It is not enough to look at what is negative and to criticise. It is essential to be positive. And my concern is not only for what happens between Christians. What kind of a link can there be with people of other religions too? Enhancing communal harmony is so important in India and the Church can be a light in this regard.

→ 1

ness or with the paschal mystery, welcoming the presence of the Risen Christ. Other topics are taken up in the sharing groups: reconciliation, solidarity, the role of prayer in daily life.

"I LIVED THROUGH SOME DIFFICULT TIMES IN SARAJEVO"

The reflection is stimulated by the presence of young people from other continents who, on different occasions, speak to groups about their own commitments and those of their Church in situations of great need. The experience of Anna, from Sarajevo, deeply touched those who heard it during the three weeks she spent in Taizé:

"My name is Anna; I come from Sarajevo. I came to Taizé to find new strength, the inner peace for a new beginning. I lived through difficult times during the war in Sarajevo—many experiences, some bad ones, but some beautiful ones too.

"Here I am able both to accept what I had to live through and to find new peace to be able to share with others what I feel, what I carry inside me. I would like to share, not the bad experiences, but a unique experience which I had with my friends, who are still in Sarajevo and who cannot yet leave. It is the experience of God's presence, of God's love and protection.

"During the war, we had almost nothing. Our life was turned completely upside down. We were afraid; we felt lost and alone. Then we realized that we were dependent upon God alone and so we welcomed him into our life. It is a beautiful experience, because we were together, in communion with Christ and with one another.

"And we found the strength that helped us to overcome the hatred within us, because at first that was very hard. We could not accept the situation, this war that caught us unawares. We realized that we couldn't do a lot, no great exploits, but that there was one thing at least that we could change—our hearts.

"Some of us decided to remain united, to help each other and to support other young people like ourselves. For two years, we were together almost every day. A group of girls began to help elderly and sick people, visiting them regularly. We brought them water; we tried to find food and other necessities for them.

"When I arrived in Taizé, I wanted to share this with others. I wish they could be attentive to the problems in the world, especially in places where there is war now, or where there may be war tomorrow. If we all open our hearts to those who suffer the most, to those who have lost everything, we can become peacemakers. Together, all together, we can accomplish something. We can help, and prepare the future, in such a way that there are no more wars.

"All those I met here have confirmed and strengthened me. We know one another, even though we are living in many different parts of the world; that is our strength. We go on with our lives in all these places, and we can be peacemakers there.

"I will be at the European meeting in Paris at the end of the year. We are going to try to make it possible for my friends to leave Sarajevo and come to Paris. I know it will be difficult, but we will try to organize a group in spite of everything. If we are together, we will be able to share our experience better: with nothing left, in Sarajevo, we discovered that God was close to us and we found a reason to live in helping others."

"WIDEN THE SPACE OF YOUR TENT...."

A young couple described the life of the meetings:

We asked Elise, four years old, our youngest child, "How would you describe Taizé to someone who has never been here?" She simply replied, "Welcome!"

Sunday, the Eucharist is over... Like every week, people begin leaving, spreading out all over Europe and beyond. Like the rhythm of breathing, departures are followed by arrivals. Once again the welcome comes to life; dormitories, houses and tents are filled. Many coaches arrive, converging from the four corners of Europe, some after two or three days on the road—from the former Soviet Union or from Portugal. Some arrive from other continents. Almost a hundred different nationalities are represented.

The diversity is surprising, even unsettling at first: how will we communicate, how will we understand one another? You ask yourself: "What are these thousands of young adults from so many countries looking for? Can our searching come together?" The crowds of people, the great simplicity of the environment create a kind of "culture shock." Our ordinary habits are forgotten and we become pilgrims: the week begins.

Very soon, the friendliness of the people you meet, the smiles on so many faces, the work together brings something new to birth in each person. Friendships are formed; people become closer... You are surprised to find yourself planning to learn Russian! Like many young people from East and West, from North and South, we discover that we are no longer alone, but part of a large international family. Among us there are priests and ministers... The presence of children and the elderly invite us to a universality that goes beyond the generations and our different commitments.

Three prayers bring us together each day. In a transparent hospitality, the community of brothers shares with each visitor the most precious thing it has. The church in shadow fosters silence; in the front, large sails are unfurled as if to collect the breath of the Spirit. A tender reminder of our vulnerability, children surround Brother Roger; they light an oil-lamp at the beginning of the prayer. In silence, the heart opens to God. On Friday evening, children from Bosnia run up to be the first ones to pray around the cross placed on the floor...to who else could we entrust the pain that is too much for us? The singing goes on and on, a resonance of the voice and the soul.

In prayer and in our discussions, the incomprehensible dramas that are tearing humanity apart are never far from us: Rwanda, Burundi, Bosnia... Cedric, Christelle and Thierry are with us this summer. These three little children from Rwanda and the tragic disappearance of their mother symbolize the wounded innocence of so many others. Listening to those who surround us can reveal deep wounds. Spontaneously we look for gestures of solidarity.

During the workshops, young people talk about their country, its difficulties and their hope. The simple prayer of God's people and its thirst for reconciliation is expressed in all languages. Brother Roger's letter, *From One Beginning to Another*, nourishes and stimulates our reflection.

On Saturday evening Father Alexander, from the Orthodox Church in Moscow, tells us: "The title of this letter at first was not clear for me. In listening to the Bible introduction about the story of Jacob, I realized that there are events that happen to us which, if we pay attention to them, can change our life. For this reason it is essential to welcome each day as a new beginning."

Just a week. In such a short time you can rediscover the vitality of the first Christian communities; there is a kind of urgency to meet, to share. Christ is near. Together, we experience the Church as something easily accessible. Our sails are filled with wind; this breath cannot be lost. We leave the hill of Taizé for other ports. "Widen the space of your tent...you will expand to left and right" (Isaiah 54,2-3).

Letter from Taizé

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